

Habitat for Humanity Vice President Hugo Martinez, left, and other board members Joe Escobedo and Melissa Guerra accept a \$1,000 donation from Southern Sanitation President Roberto Treviño, right, Tuesday morning at Gutierrez Elementary School. The event was a kick-off for the new aluminum can recycling program to raise money for Habitat



Photo by Andy Ellis | Laredo Morning Times

Habitat hopes to collect 75,000 lbs of aluminum

By KIRSTEN CROW
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

While the construction of many new homes begins with a concrete foundation, a community-wide movement could lay the groundwork for a new Habitat for Humanity home with the collection of more than 75,000 pounds of aluminum cans.

“Normally houses start with a nail, or a brick, but in this situation, it starts with a can,” said Hugo Martinez, vice president of the board of directors for Habitat for Humanity.

Community leaders kicked off a three-month campaign for the program, called Cans for Habitat, on Tuesday, optimistic it would encourage recycling while benefiting disadvantaged families.

The project aims to encourage organizations and community members to collect cans for Habitat for Humanity, then use the revenue generated from the sale

of the recycled materials toward the construction of a new home.

Included among organizations participating in the program are Habitat for Humanity, Laredo Independent School District, United Independent School District, City of Laredo, Laredo Entertainment Center and Washington’s Birthday Celebration Association.

A new Habitat home costs roughly \$40,000 — or 70,000 to 80,000 pounds of aluminum cans, depending on the resale value, said Joe Millham, construction field supervisor at Habitat.

“We gather donations year-round, so this is a way of bringing in all the school districts and community to raise money in a different way of writing a check,” he said.

Commissioner Jerry Garza, who spearheaded the project, said it’s something that has never been done before in Webb County.

“This is one way the entire community can get involved,” he said. “All you really have to do is

collect aluminum cans.”

The City of Laredo may also soon be pitching in on the project: Councilman Mike Garza requested to place an item on the Laredo City Council agenda to donate three months of aluminum cans or the revenue generated from the city’s recycling program to Habitat, which would amount to about \$2,600. He said it could catalyze a “surge of participation.”

The project is already well underway — Roberto Treviño, president of Southern Sanitation, donated \$1,000 to the effort on Tuesday, and can collection has already begun, including 126 pounds collected at the Menudo Bowl.

Viky Garcia, special projects director at Habitat for Humanity, said there are a few available receptacles for the project that could be used in homes or businesses.

For more information on how to participate, contact Habitat for Humanity at 724-3227.

Laser visa bills introduced

By SCOTT SHAFFER
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

Companion bills have been introduced in Congress that would allow Mexican nationals with laser visas uninterrupted stays of up to six months in the U.S.

U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo, and Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, have introduced companion bills that would extend the current regulations.

“This bill (Secure Border Crossing Card Entry Act of 2007) addresses what I believe to be a serious imbalance in the way our government treats foreign guests,” said Cuellar.

Currently, Mexican nationals with laser visas are allowed to enter the country for up to only 30 days although they have undergone rigorous vetting and screening and are “screened again as they enter the United States,” according to Cuellar.

Canadian visitors are not required to get laser visas from the

U.S. State Department and are allowed to stay in the country for up to six months.

“We must strive to treat all of our foreign guests fairly, regardless of their national origin,” Cuellar said.

The senator agreed.

“As we work to secure our border and implement broader immigration reforms, we must balance security with legitimate trade and travel,” Cornyn said.

“Many of them (laser visa holders) come here to do business and spend money which boosts the economy in South Texas and contributes to job creation,” Cornyn said.

“I see no reason that we should treat citizens and nationals of our northern neighbor differently from our southern neighbor,” Cornyn added.

Mayor Salinas applauded the initiatives by Cuellar and Cornyn.

“I think it’s a great idea. Everybody ought to be on an equal stand,” Salinas said.

“I hope this sends a clear mes-

sage that Mexico is a good neighbor and should be treated with dignity and respect like any other country,” Salinas added.

CEO and president of Laredo Chamber of Commerce Miguel Conchas repeated the importance of the bills for U.S.-Mexico relations.

“There’s always been a marked difference in how the southern border is looked at in the Congress,” Conchas said.

“It’s a good signal to our southern neighbors who visit the U.S. for medical, business or leisure,” Conchas added.

Local business leader Les Norton was equally upbeat upon hearing of the bills.

“I am very excited about it. It’s a great step forward,” Norton said.

“It’s our sister country and our neighbors. I think it will prove beneficial for both countries,” Norton added.

(Scott Shaffer may be reached at 728-2547 or by e-mail at sshaffer@lmtonline.com)

THE BLOTTER

ASSAULT ON A PUBLIC SERVANT

■ Monday, in the 3600 block of San Agustin, 27-year-old Andres Cerna and 25-year-old Maria De Jesus Luna, who reside in the 4500 block of Corrada, were arrested at the intersection of Boston and Santa Ursula.

Cerna was charged with theft, third degree felony assault on a public servant, resisting arrest and resisting transportation.

Luna was charged with theft and failure to identify. Cerna and Luna were taken to Webb County Jail. Luna is being held on a \$2,500 bond; Cerna was denied bond.

DISCHARGING A FIREARM

■ In the 2200 block of Pierce Street, Tuesday, at 12:32 a.m., 18-year-old Jose Luis Rivera III was arrested at his residence and charged with discharging of a firearm in certain municipalities, third degree felony possession of a controlled sub-

stance and possession of marijuana.

Police said 2.3 grams of cocaine and 8.3 grams of marijuana were recovered from his possession.

CRIMINAL MISCHIEF

■ At 4:15 p.m. Monday in the 1400 block of Clark Boulevard, 45-year-old Zita Vela, who resides in the 100 block of East Travis, was arrested and charged with assault, family violence and criminal mischief. She was taken to Webb County Jail, where she was held without bond. Police said Vela damaged the front window and the back window to her husband’s vehicle, and assaulted him, while he was at Tobana.

WARRANTS SERVED

■ In the 1700 block of Piedra China, Monday, at 3:19 p.m., 53-year-old Roberto Adams was arrested at his residence and served with three Laredo Police warrants

DWI

■ At the intersection of Jemez and Canones on Saturday, at 12:23 p.m., 20-year-old David Johnson, who resides in the Los Altos Subdivision, was arrested by police and charged with driving while intoxicated. Police said Johnson refused to take the Breathalyzer exam. Johnson was taken to Webb County Jail. Judge Ricardo Rangel denied him bond.

■ In an unrelated case at the intersection of Fenwick and McPherson Saturday, at 2:23 a.m., 33-year-old Diego Guerra Sotelo who resides in the 400 block of Santa Maria was arrested by police and charged with driving while intoxicated and possession of marijuana.

23 discovered in trailer

SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Protection agents intercepted the smuggling of 23 Mexican nationals Saturday at Laredo.

The ICE agents responded to a call from CBP who said that several dozen individuals were locked inside a tractor trailer. Agents said the truck driver was Stanley Martin Johnson.

Martin Johnson was formally charged Monday in federal court with unlawfully transporting undocumented immigrants into the United States. His bond was set at \$75,000.

The immigrants have been processed and returned to Mexico authorities said.